

# This week's NSFC Literature challenge

## Protest in literature and #Blacklivesmatter

Read the poems here and use the links to explore how racial identities are presented in poetry.

**Level 1 challenge:** complete the reading and make notes/ mind-maps/ powerpoint presentations

**Level 2 challenge:** use one of these discussion points to explain how poetry here is used to address racism:

- Themes of freedom and equality are used to show how powerful the poets' protest against racism is. Discuss.
- The way these poets write show their conflicting emotions: both repression and fear, as well as pride in their racial identity. Discuss.
- The way a modern British poet like Deanna Rodgers experiences racism is different to older American poets like Maya Angelou and Langston Hughes. Discuss.

## **Research:**

Black History and literature:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/101640/celebrating-black-history-month>

Protest and power in literature:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/101581/poems-of-protest-resistance-and-empowerment>

Post-colonialism in literature: [https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/blog/what-is-postcolonial-literature/?gclid=CjwKCAjw5vz2BRAtEiwAbcVIL40Ldv3paeMt3s-I04Ac9KL5eZSUvEvQpNVQoE\\_9tKWWCOLrIuo5dBoCmKcQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/blog/what-is-postcolonial-literature/?gclid=CjwKCAjw5vz2BRAtEiwAbcVIL40Ldv3paeMt3s-I04Ac9KL5eZSUvEvQpNVQoE_9tKWWCOLrIuo5dBoCmKcQAvD_BwE)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postcolonial\\_literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postcolonial_literature)

## **Poets:**

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/maya-angelou>

<https://poetryarchive.org/poet/benjamin-zephaniah/>

<https://poetryarchive.org/poet/langston-hughes/>

## **Novel recommendations:**

- 'Heart of Darkness' Joseph Conrad
- 'Small Island' Andrea Levy
- 'The Colour Purple' Alice Walker
- 'Half a Yellow Sun' Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
- 'Beloved' Toni Morrison
- 'To Kill a Mockingbird' Harper Lee
- 'Things Fall Apart' Chinua Achebe
- 'Invisible Man' Ralph Ellison
- 'On Beauty' Zadie Smith

# Still I Rise

BY MAYA ANGELOU

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,  
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?  
Don't you take it awful hard  
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines  
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?  
Does it come as a surprise

That I dance like I've got diamonds  
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise  
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.  
I rise  
I rise  
I rise.

# Caged Bird

BY MAYA ANGELOU

A free bird leaps  
on the back of the wind  
and floats downstream  
till the current ends  
and dips his wing  
in the orange sun rays  
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks  
down his narrow cage  
can seldom see through  
his bars of rage  
his wings are clipped and  
his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze  
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees  
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn  
and he names the sky his own

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams  
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream  
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.

## Deanna Rodger's 'Being British'

I always get asked,  
'Where do you come from?'  
My repeated reply is  
'London.

The town that sheltered a mother fleeing from a war-torn lad,  
baby in belly given chance to be a man,  
a city of prosperity.  
She sought jobs allowing her to keep her dignity, independently  
living in a state,  
not off it.  
one son,  
a bright boy of renewable energy.  
He knew all he'd ever be  
was a product of the city that changed his destiny.'

'OK,'  
they say,  
'but what country?'  
I breathe deeply,

swallowing sarcastic syllables, and exhale,  
'Great Britain.  
The island  
throned in seas that channelled safety.  
She carried men to defend  
countrysides scattered with towns full of factories.  
The curator of colonies

voiced view to keep view,  
exploit used to heavily recruit  
natural warlikes  
to fight aggressively,  
with strength and bravery.  
Fifty-two thousand casualties,  
Ghurkhas' support  
over two world wars.  
Nearly half a million fought for  
Great Britain.'  
I'm teasing them,

because although it's not a lie  
I know it's not the desired response  
and so am not surprised when they reply,  
'Where are your parents from?'

See, I can't hide pigment skin within words,  
Whether fact or fiction.  
So I tell them  
I'm a product of miscegenation.  
That my parents' parents are from Jamaica and Scotland.  
Raised in England,  
they found love and made life in London  
to birth and breed a British girl.

So while I'm an addict for hard food,  
I fiend for the smell of 'eggs an' ba'on' in the morning,  
I'm a sucker for a cuppa  
And I'll batter a fish and chips in less than fifteen minutes.  
I was raised by the church and educated by EastEnders.



Friday nights of teenage life were spent going on drink benders.  
I can't pretend, 'cause  
all I know is GB  
and I suppose on paper I could quite possibly read as  
an ideal recruit in the BNP,  
wear my balaclava too high so my eyes can't see  
the route of my journey to the RWB,  
ticket's the qualifications on my CRB  
five for hate crimes would get me VIP.

But a face-to-face interview  
would refuse my application  
on the grounds that those I walk on are not my birthright nation,  
profile is proof of racial integration,  
defies the silent slogan of skin-based segregation  
and as the tick box of White/Caribbean is crossed  
my rights are wrong and I should politely get lost.

Pack bags,  
But before I'm forced to leave  
I'll leave thoughts to ponder on.  
Where do you, your parents  
And your ancestors come from.

# Freedom

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

Freedom will not come  
Today, this year  
    Nor ever  
Through compromise and fear.

I have as much right  
As the other fellow has  
    To stand  
On my two feet  
And own the land.

I tire so of hearing people say,  
*Let things take their course.*  
*Tomorrow is another day.*  
I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.  
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.

Freedom  
Is a strong seed  
Planted  
In a great need.  
I live here, too.  
I want my freedom  
Just as you.